**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**PSALMS-076**. **MOUNTAINS ROUND MOUNT ZION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. 2. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth, even for ever."*

*Psalm 125:1-2*

The so-called Songs of Degrees, of which this psalm is one, are probably a pilgrim's song-book, and possibly date from the period of the restoration of Israel from the Babylonish captivity. In any case, this little psalm looks very much like a record of the impression that was made on the pilgrim, as he first topped the crest of the hill from which he looked on Jerusalem. Two peculiarities of its topographical position are both taken here as symbols of spiritual realities, for the singularity of the situation of the city is that it stands on a mountain and is girdled by mountains. There is a tongue of land or peninsula cut off from the surrounding country by deep ravines, on which are perched the buildings of the city, while across the valley on the eastern side is Olivet, and, on the south, another hill, the so-called Hill of Evil Counsel; but upon the west and north sides there are no conspicuous summits, though the ground rises. Thus, really, though not apparently, there lie all round the city encircling defences of mountains. Similarly, says the Psalmist, set and steadfast as on a mountain, and compassed about by a protection, like the bastions of the everlasting hills, are they whose trust is in the Lord. Faith, then, gives inward stability, and faith secures an encircling defence.

But, more than that, notice that the mountains encompass a mountain. Faith, in some measure, makes the protected like the Protector. And then, beyond that, notice the two for evers. Zion cannot be moved, it abideth for ever, and the Lord is about His people from henceforth and for ever. To trust in God gives the transitory creature a kind of share in the uncreated eternity of that in which he trusts. Now these are four thoughts worth carrying away with us.

**I. The simple act of trust in God brings inward stability.**

The word here that is rightly translated trust, like most expressions in the Old Testament for religious emotion, has a distinctly metaphorical colouring about it. It literally means to hang upon something, and so, beautifully, it tells us what faith is--just hanging upon God. Whoever has laid his tremulous hand on a fixed something, partakes, in the measure in which he does grasp it, of the fixity of that on which he lays hold; so they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, that stands there summer and winter, day and night, year out and year in, with its strong buttresses and its immovable mass, the very emblem of solidity and stability.

Ay! and this is true about these tremulous hearts of ours. There is one way to make them stable, and only one; and that is that they shall be fastened, as it were, to that which is stable, and so be steadfast because they hold by what is steadfast. There is no other means by which any heart can be made immovable, except in so far as it may be moved by holy impulses and sweet drawings of love and loftinesses of aspiration towards God; there is no other means by which a heart, with all its inward perturbations and all its outward sources of agitation, can be made calm and still, except by living, deep, continual fellowship with Him who is the Eternal Calm, and from whose stable Being we mutable men can derive serenity which is a faint likeness of His immutability. We which have believed do enter into rest.

How can I still these hot desires of mine, this self-asserting will, all these various passions and emotions which sweep through my soul, and which must not be made mute and dead--or else there will come corruption and stagnation--but must be made so to move as that in their very motion shall be rest? How can I do that? By one way, and one only. Live in fellowship with God, and that will quiet perturbations within and tumults without. The foot of the Master on the midnight stormy sea will smooth the waves which the moonbeams have not power to still, but only to reveal their heavings. They that trust in the Lord shall be like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, and yet is not torpid in its immobility, but full of fertility and of beauty wedded to its steadfastness.

In like manner, the only way by which not only the inward storms can be quieted, but the outward assaults of perturbing circumstances, disasters, changes, difficult duties, and the like, can ever be received with tranquillity is, that they should be received in quiet faith. And, in like manner, the only way by which men can be made steadfast and immovable in brave, pertinacious adherence to the simple law of right, whatsoever temptations may try to draw them aside, and whatsoever frowns may gather upon the face of affairs so as to frighten them from the path of rectitude--the only way by which they can conquer evil, so as not to be hurried into forbidden paths, is this same making sure of their hold upon God, and carrying with them day by day, and moment by moment, into all the little difficulties and small temptations that would lead to trivial faults, the one solemn thought that bids all these back into their lairs--God is near me and I am with Him.

Oh, brethren! if we could live in touch with Him and, as this great word for trust suggests, be fastened to Him, as a man, swinging from a cliff over the crawling sea, fathoms below him, clutches the rope that is his safety--then we should live in tranquillity, and be steadfast, immovable.

They say that in the great church of St. Peter there is only one temperature in summer and winter; that the fiercest heat may be pouring down in the colonnades, or the sharpest frost may have silenced the tinkling fall of the fountains in the Piazza; but within the great portal the thermometer stands the same. Thus, if we live in the Temple, and keep inside its doors, the thermometer in our hearts will be fixed; and the anemometer--the measurer of the wind--will point to calm all the year round. They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved.

**II. Again, this same attitude of realising the divine Presence, Will, and Help, will bring around us encircling defences.**

I have already said that one peculiarity of the topography of the sacred city is that, at first sight, the metaphor of my text seems to break down, for nobody, looking at the situation of the city with uninstructed eye, would say that it was compassed all around with mountains. On two sides it manifestly is; on two sides it apparently is not, though the land rises on the north and west till it is higher than the tops of the houses. We may not be fanciful in taking that as a parable. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people--a very real defence, but a defence that it takes an instructed eye to see; no obvious protection, palpable to the vulgar touch, and manifest to the sensuous eye, but something a great deal better than that--a real protection, through which we may be sure that nothing which is evil can ever pass.

Whatsoever does get over the encircling mountains, and reaches us, we may be sure, is not an evil but a very real good. Only we have to interpret the protection on the principles of faith, and not on those of sense. When, then, there come down upon us--as there do upon us all, thank God!--dark days, and sad days, and solitary days, and losses and bitternesses of a thousand kinds, do not let us falter in the belief that if we have our hearts set on God, nothing has come to us but what He has let through. Our sorrows are His angels, though their faces are dark, and though they bear a sword that flames and turns every way. It is hard to believe; it is certainly true, and if we could carry the confidence of it as a continual possession into our ordinary lives, they would be very different from what they are to-day.

**III. And then, remember the other thing that I said. My text suggests that-- Simple trust in God, in some measure, assimilates the protected to the Protector.**

The mountains girdle a mountain, and so my trust opens my heart to the entrance into my heart of something akin to God. As the Apostle Peter, in his brave way, is not afraid to say, it makes us partakers of the divine nature. The immovableness of the trustful man is not all unlike the calmness of the trusted God; and the steadfastness of the one is a reflex of the unchangeableness of the other. We have not understood the meaning of faith, nor have we risen to the experience of its best effects upon ourselves, unless we understand that its great blessing and fruit, and the purpose for which we are commanded to cherish it, is that thereby we may become like Him in whom we trust. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. That is the key to the degradations that inhere in idolatrous worship, and that principle is true about all worship--as the god so is every one that trusteth in it. As the mountains are round about Mount Zion, God is round about the people that are becoming Godlike.

**IV. Mark further the significant repetition of the same expression in reference to the stability of the man protected and the continuance of the protection.**

Both are for ever. That is to say, if it is true that God is round about me, and that, in some humble measure, my heart has been opening to be calmed and steadied by the influx of His own life, then His for ever is my for ever, and it cannot be that He should live and I should die. The guarantee of the eternal being of the trustful soul is the experience to-day of the reality of the divine protection. And thus we may face everything--life, death, whatsoever may come, assured that nothing touches the continuity and the perpetuity of the union between the trusting soul and the trusted God. The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from thee; nor shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord. The earthquake comes. It shatters a continent and changes the face of nature; makes valleys where there were mountains, and mountains where there were vales, and open seas where there were fertile plains and covers everything with ruin and with rubbish. But there emerge from the cloudy and chaotic confusion the city perched on the hill and its encompassing heights. The world passeth away, and the fashion thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.